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ABSTRACT

West Virginia Bill 300 (Jobs Through Education Act) requires all students in grades 1-11 to take the Stanford Achievement Test. A minimum of 50 percent of a school's students in grades 3-11 must perform in the third quartile or the school will be considered deficient. A clause in the bill states that all students will be tested except those special education students whose individualized education programs (IEP) exclude them from testing. State Department of Education inclusion and exclusion guidelines state that for a student to receive an 11th-grade warranty, the student must have taken the tests with no modifications. A preliminary test given in the fall of 1996 to 420 students in Mineral County schools showed that all grades in all schools increased in percentile ranks when students with IEPs were eliminated from aggregate scores. Following the test, a survey of general and special education teachers revealed concerns about inclusion of special education students in aggregate test scores; support needed for classroom inclusion; pressure to exclude standardized testing on students' IEPs; and the effect on special education students' self-concept, motivation, and desire to stay in school if excluded from testing. Primary teachers questioned the appropriateness of standardized testing for first and second graders. As a result of generally mandated standardized testing, it is feared that teachers will teach to the test and that special education students will once again become isolated from their peers. (SAS)

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STANFORD ACHIEVEMENT TESTS AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Abstract. As public school accountability becomes correlated with standardized achievement test scores, general teachers are especially concerned about students with special education needs. Presenters comment on one rural county school system and report the dilemma many teachers face.

In his State of the Union address to the American people, President Clinton made it clear that his number one priority for the next four years would be to ensure that Americans have the best education in the world. As part of his action plan, he proposed rigorous standards, with national tests in fourth grade reading and eighth grade math to make sure all children master the basics. Every fourth grader would be able to read; every eighth grader would know basic math and algebra.

To make sure this goal is met, the President has pledged the development of national tests in fourth grade reading and eighth grade math challenging every state and community to test every child in these critical areas by 1999. By using standardized tests, local, state, national and international comparisons in achievement would be available for all students. Parents would know if their children are mastering critical basic skills, teachers would know if their instruction is effective, and school administrators would know where strengths and deficiencies are occurring in their schools.

One state that clearly agrees with the President's challenge is West Virginia. In the years past, West Virginia administered the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) in its entirety for grades 3, 6, 9, and 11. West Virginia made impressive gains on the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) State Math Assessments taken by 43 states. In the fourth grade, West Virginia ranked ninth nationally, in the eighth grade, it finished fifteenth. Recently, West Virginia legislators passed Senate Bill 300, Jobs Though Education Act, requiring all students in grades one through eleven to take the Stanford Achievement Test. Grades one and two will only complete a partial battery consisting of reading, mathematics, language and listening. Under this new law, a minimum of 50% of the school's students in grades three through eleven must perform in the third quartile in total basic skills. If the school does not meet that criteria, it is considered to be deficient. Any student performing below the 50th percentile in the areas of reading, mathematics, or language at grade eight or above will be placed in a skills improvement program in the area of deficiency. A county warranty, stamp, or other appropriate symbol will be awarded to every student who achieves a proficiency level of the 50th percentile by grade eleven in the basic skills area.

A key provision established by the West Virginia Bill 300 is a clause which states that all students will be tested with the Stanford Achievement Test ***except*** those in special education whole ***individualized education program*** specifies that the student shall be

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excluded from the state wide assessment program. This provision has far reaching effects both from a practical as well as accreditation perspective. Past standardization samples from the CTBS (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills) excluded students from special education in their norming sample. However, the Standard Achievement Test does include students from special education in their norming sample. The percentage and disability categories are : emotionally disturbed, 0.3%; mentally handicapped, 0.1%; and the learning disabled, 2.5% (Harcourt & Brace, 1996). Students identified as having severe mental handicaps or emotional disturbances were not included. As in their past standardization norms, students identified as being gifted or having speech disorders were considered part of the traditional norming sample. Interestingly, students with these identifications are also considered eligible for special education services, at least in West Virginia.

The West Virginia Department of Education has issued a memorandum providing some guidelines for county schools to follow for inclusion and exclusion purposes (West Virginia Office of Special Education, 1997). Any student, including a student with a disability, who meets the state and county's graduation requirements can earn a standard diploma. However, to be considered for a warranty a student must participate in the State Assessment Program and take the grade level test with **NO** modifications. Each county school system will establish a specific percentile level that must be met by a student on the state assessment test to earn a warranty. The Individualized Education Program Committee (IEP) must decide on an individual basis if a student with a disability should participate in the testing program. This must be documented on the IEP and reviewed annually. Decisions regarding participation of a student who is disabled and has a Section 504 plan must be made by a Section 504 Committee. Students with disabilities who are involved in learning basic academic skills and other components of the general education curriculum for part or most of the instructional day, should participate in the program. Accommodations (large print, braille tests, helping with bubbling for completing answer sheets, interpreter signing directions, etc.) may be applied, when necessary, to enable a student with disabilities to participate in the program. **These accommodations should not be such that they interfere with standardization procedures.** In addition, they must be described and justified on the student's IEP or Section 504 plan. If it is determined by the IEPC or the Section 504 Committee that a student cannot be tested under standard conditions, but can participate with modifications to those

conditions, these must be described and justified on the student's IEP or Section 504 plan. Examples of modifications might include having parts of the test read or extending time factors. **The test results of students who test with modifications will NOT be aggregated with the results of their peers**, however, the school will receive the individual student's test record with the responses that were right and wrong (raw score) for each subtest. **If an IEP Committee determines that a student with disabilities cannot participate in the State Assessment Program, even with accommodations and/or modifications, it must document this decision and provide a justification on the IEP for exclusion from testing**. This last option was primarily designed for those students with disabilities, such as the moderately mentally impaired and students with severe and profound disabilities who were not included in the norming sample of the Standford Achievement Test, whose instruction focuses on the development of functional life skills. This group of students will be given a different assessment program which is in the process of being developed.

In the Fall of 1996, the Mineral County Schools in West Virginia gave a preliminary test to all its students to allow educators, administrators, and students to look at the Standard Achievement Tests and what might be expected when formal, mandated testing would begin. The Harcourt Brace Company , which developed and publishes the SAT, agreed to report test results in two ways. The first would include all student who were tested (general and special); the second would exclude all students with an IEP. Almost without exception all grades in all schools increased in percentile ranks when the students with IEP's scores were eliminated from the aggregate scores. Almost twice the number of grades would have met accreditation standards when the scores from students identified as having an IEP were eliminated. Once again, students having IEP's because of speech problems or giftedness were automatically not considered a part of the special education population. There was no attempt to see if scores would have declined if these students' scores were eliminated from the aggregate accounting. Looking at one school in Table 1 presents a fairly typical sample.

Table 1
Standford Achievement Test Scores for School E

School	Description	# of Spec. Students	# of Reg. Students	% of Spec. Ed. Pop.
E	5 - 8	94	586	16%

	# of students	# of sp. students	percentile rank w/ sp. students	percentile rank w/o sp.students
Grade 5	147	17	54	60
Grade 6	138	11	58	62
Grade 7	135	18	54	61
TOTAL:	**420**	**46**		

Of the 420 students being tested in grades 5, 6, and 7, 46 were identified as receiving special education in the general education program. This is 11% of that school's population. It triples the percentage of students with special education needs that were included in the Standford Achievement standardization population. Percentile ranks with the special education population were 54, 58, and 54 for grades 5,6, and 7. Without the special education population they were 60, 62, and 61. It should be noted that, in this county, some schools have as much as 16% of their school population having written IEP's.

Following this pilot testing, a survey was conducted with both the general and special education teachers in Mineral County. For the most part, general educators felt too much emphasis is being placed on just one type of assessment. They were also very concerned about the inclusion of special education students' scores being included in their aggregate test scores. On the one hand, they have been encouraged to accept special education students and modified their instruction to accommodate individual needs; on the other hand, they now must give greater concentration on needs as dictated by standardized achievement questions. Many general educators expressed concern that they have not received all the support needed to effectively teach students with special education needs in their general classes. Special education teachers surveyed indicated they are now facing pressure from some general classroom

teachers to exclude standardized testing on students' IEPs. Some also feel there will be a dramatic increase in the number of students which will be referred to special education. They note that students who receive IEP's because of identification as gifted probably increase scores on standardized tests. Some secondary teachers feel none of the special education students should even be considered in the Standford Achievement Test accountability. However, if that were to be fostered, none of the students who received special education services would be eligible to receive the warranty associated with the high school diploma. Such could effect special education students' self concept, motivation , and desire to even stay in school. It could also have serious implications for post high school plans. Primary school teachers question the appropriateness of standardized achievement testing for first and second grade students. Their opinions are consistent with the position of the Association for Childhood Education International (ASCI, 1991).

Since the publication of "a Nation at Risk" in 1983, standardized testing has dramatically increased. Teachers feel compelled to spend time preparing their students to primarily master the basic skills included on adopted state wide tests. They may end up teaching to the test. And students with special education needs who have come so far with inclusion practices, may find themselves once again isolated from their peers . Responsible educators should not let this happen.

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